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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 012945

SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO U/S BURNS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/11/2019

TAGS: PARM PREL RS TSPA

SUBJECT: U.S. AND RUSSIAN COMM SATELLITE COLLISION

Classified By: A. Friedt, 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST. See paragraph 3 below.

12. (S) BACKGROUND: At approximately 11:55 a.m. (EST) on February 10, there was a collision between an active privately-owned and -operated U.S. commercial Iridium-33 communications satellite and a "dead" (i.e., inactive since 1995) Russian military communications satellite (Cosmos 2251) in low Earth orbit.

(S) There have been some limited telephone disruptions in the Middle East and parts of South Asia due to the loss of the Iridium-33 satellite. The Cosmos 2251 was a Russian communications satellite that was launched in June 1993 and assessed as inactive since 1995. U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) is investigating the collision, but detailed answers may not be forthcoming for days.

(S) News reports of the collision are already out. The U.S. Air Force's Space Surveillance Network is tracking 505 pieces from Cosmos and 194 pieces from Iridium in two separate debris fields. The number of pieces of debris detected and tracked will increase as the debris clouds spread with time. The debris is a hazard for other Iridium satellites; initial analysis indicates there is little risk to the International Space Station. Potential risks to non-U.S. space-based assets and upcoming manned and unmanned launches are unknown at this time. Due to the small mass of the debris pieces from both spacecraft, there is an extremely low risk of debris hazards to life and property on the Earth's surface.

(SBU) According to NASA, Russian debris experts have already asked NASA experts about newly-identified debris fields. In a public statement, Nicholas Johnson, NASA's chief scientist for orbital debris at the Johnson Space Center confirmed the collision occurred at an altitude of 790 kilometers (490 miles) over northern Siberia, resulting in large number of debris from both objects. State expects General Kevin Chilton, Commander STRATCOM -- or another senior DOD official -- to directly telephone his Russian counterpart, Major General Oleg Ostapenko, Space Troops Commander. The U.S. will also notify other leading spacefaring nations about the collision through diplomatic channels (SEPTEL) and public affairs guidance will be made available to all overseas Posts.

(SBU) The U.S. follows safe practices for the operation and disposal of spacecraft, upon the end of their useful service life, and to mitigate debris that may threaten other spacecraft, including manned flight. The U.S. encourages other nations to follow the established principles outlined in existing treaties and international agreements for the peaceful use of outer space. This includes the use of best practices, and transparency and confidence building

measures, which should be conducted on a bilateral and multilateral basis, as appropriate.

13. (SBU) GUIDANCE REQUEST: The talking points in paragraph 4 may be used by appropriate senior U.S. officials with appropriate Russian government interlocutors. Washington will transmit public affairs guidance for use on an 'if asked' basis SEPTEL.

14. (SBU) BEGIN TALKING POINTS:

- U.S. Strategic Command informed the Department of State that there was a collision on February 10 involving an active U.S. commercial Iridium-33 satellite and an inactive Russian satellite (Cosmos 2251) in low Earth orbit.

- U.S. Strategic Command is currently investigating the events leading up to the collision, and details may not be forthcoming for many days while the analysis of the event continues.

- As of late yesterday, the U.S. Air Force's Space Surveillance Network was tracking 505 pieces from Cosmos and 194 pieces from Iridium in two separate debris fields.

- There is little risk to the International Space Station due to orbiting debris from the collision. However, DoD and NASA are conducting further analyses on the risks due to the debris.

- The U.S. believes this is an opportunity to pursue bilateral transparency and confidence-building measures related to our respective military space activities/operations.

- Since space is becoming an increasingly congested environment, heightened space situational awareness as well as international cooperation between governments and industry is critical in the future.

- The United States welcomes any information on this event that Russia can share to help identify the causes of the collision as a first step towards ensuring we can prevent similar incidents in the future.

Embassy may additionally draw upon, as appropriate:

- U.S. Strategic Command, regularly notifies users, for example, foreign governments and commercial operators, when its tracking and analysis identifies a safety-of-flight issue.

-- Such analyses are primarily focused on ensuring safety of manned flight and national security missions.

- The U.S. takes its responsibility in the space domain very seriously; we have been, and continue to be, proactive in identifying potential hazards and taking steps to preserve safety of flight in this complex environment.

- When the potential for a close approach is identified, experts analyze options for avoiding an impact, including the possibility of maneuvering a satellite if necessary and possible. The decision to maneuver always rests with the satellite operator.

- Tracking data on the debris from this collision will be included in the Joint Space Operations Center's Space Catalogue - "<http://www.Space-track.org>" - an unclassified U.S. Air Force internet site, within approximately 48-72 hours after the collision.

END TALKING POINTS.

CLINTON